# EDWIN F. DAVIS, NEW YORK'S LEGALIZED SLAYER

## The Man of Mystery Who as State Electrician Ends the Lives Forfeit to Society Never Knows Anything About Murderer.

## He Has Officiated as Executioner 183 Times in the Last Twenty-four Years and Has Earned a Total of $45,750.

By GURDEN EDWARDS.

UP AT Sing Sing during the days immediately preceding the death of the four gunmen there flitted a sinister figure whose work, more than any other phase of the whole grewsome affair, emphasized the barbarism of capital punishment as practised in New York. This was the figure of the State Electrician, who, cloaked in secrecy, has been killing fellow human beings for the state for twenty-four hours—183 of them in all to date—at $250 apiece, earning a total of $45,750 in these fees.

The premise that capital punishment as it is carried out in this state is barbarous cannot depend for proof on considerations of sympathy, or even common humanity, for the four victims of April 13. The facts are too well known to place reliance in that direction. The men were little deserving of pity; they were heartless murderers; their lives were not only worthless to society but were a menace to it. It is recorded in affidavits that they committed many murders besides that of Rosenthal, for which they died, and that they always held themselves ready to commit more for a price.

### THE BRUTALIZING EFFECT OF ELECTROCUTIONS.

All of these things can be said in defence of capital punishment in their cases and many others; yet there is one phase of it that even such a view does not justify, and that is the brutalizing effect of the whole affair, not only on the society in whose name the death sentence is carried out, but more especially on the individual who does the actual work of putting men to death.

There was not even the pretence of indirection about it. It was the practised hand of State Electrician Edwin F. Davis that killed directly the four men, while his expert eye watched their bodies stiffen and relax, stiffen and relax, watching, with a coldly professional scrutiny, the process of destroying their vital functions with the pitiless electric death machine of his own perfecting.

That was the sheer barbarity of it, in sharp contrast to the effort to mitigate personal responsibility for killing that is made in some states, where hanging is still practised, but the actual executioner is never known, even to himself. In those states three prison guards are assigned to the work. They are in a box, where they cannot see the condemned man as he stands on the trap. Before each of them there is a taut cord running across a block, and each holds a sharp knife against the cord in front of him. At a signal from the hangman they each simultaneously cut one cord.

### THREE EXECUTIONERS BUT ONLY ONE KILLS.

But only one of those cords actually springs the trap beneath the victim and plunges him through to death. Two of the cords have no effect, and none of those three men knows which was the effective cord, and no one besides themselves knows which cord each cut. They are assigned to do this work as a part of their routine prison duties, without extra pay, and they may decline to act if they want to.

But it is not so with executions in the State of New York. The executioner here is called by the more euphonious title of State Electrician. But there the euphony stops. Since 1890, when the first electrocution took place in the death of William Kemmler, of Erie County, this one man has put scores of his fellow human beings to death in the name of the law.

On April 13 "Dago Frank," ashen and shrinking, stumbling and babbling his prayers in the dreary monotone of almost unconscious fear, was led into the death chamber at Sing Sing, after being penned up many weeks in a cell in the next room, contemplating the relentless approach of his doom.

### STATE ELECTRICIAN DAVIS IN DEATH CHAMBER.

In the death chamber the State Electrician stood waiting for him, and then watched his keepers strap him into the death machine he had perfected from the original designs of other men. Then he stepped to the switchboard, and, like a motorman at his controller, began manipulating a lever, sending from 1,800 to 2,200 volts of electricity raging through the body of the victim. The voltage was determined by his expert judgment of the amount required to bring quick death based on the constitution of the man in the chair; and then the first shock was followed by many more expert manipulations of the lever as the executioner stood there calmly watching his victim die. The first high pressure was maintained for from five to seven seconds, then reduced to 200 volts until a half minute elapsed, again raised, again lowered, and finally raised once more to high voltage for a few seconds, when the contact was finally broken. His hand has become so expert at it that he could take his eyes off his work to squint around the end of the partition hiding the switchboard to observe the effect of the current on the dying man.

After that came the doctors with their examination. But the spectacle was not yet finished. The doctors stepped back, and once more the state electrician's practised hand moved back and forth at the lever, repeating the application of electricity. When finally the current was shut off again the doctors made their examination, and then turned to the witnesses and said, "I pronounce this man dead," and Mr. Davis had earned his first $250.

But on the morning of April 13 even this was not all. He stepped away from his switchboard and watched the prison officers unstrap that lifeless form from the chair and carry it away. Three times the operation was repeated, and at the end he had earned $1,000.

There were present witnesses to these deaths, as required by the law; most of them saw only one execution, and a single such sight was enough to send many of them away nauseated, a spectacle seared in their brains to return again to haunt their waking and sleeping vision.

After the fourth man was declared dead Davis stepped away from the switchboard, calmly wiping his hands on his handkerchief and apparently as unmoved as if he had simply been lighting and dimming the electric lamps used to test the current. There were some of the witnesses whose brains were not too numbed by the horror of what they had seen to observe small details who said there was even a dry smile, as of professional pride, on his face.

One wonders what must be the physical and mental makeup of a man who could do this thing. Heretofore little has been written of State Electrician Davis as a personality. He has been little more than a name, not often mentioned as he has come and gone these twenty-four years about his work of death, not arousing a great deal of interest apparently, for never, with the exception of the first electrocution, has so much attention been directed upon his work as in the case of the four gunmen; never before was there such an atmosphere of tension surrounding the work he does in the name of the law.

### AN UNMOVED FIGURE IN THE MIDST OF DESPAIR.

Even at this last affair he passed in and out—scarcely noticed beforehand and uninterviewed—for two or three days preceding, testing and grooming and tuning up his engine of death to do its work well—a sinister, methodical, unmoved figure in the midst of fear, despair and grief.

The State Prison Department assists him in maintaining the secrecy in which he seeks to veil himself. As with the men of mystery who guillotined the criminals of France, everything is done to hide him from the public gaze. Only evasive replies could be obtained at Albany when knowledge was sought of the personality and home life of this man whom the state hires to kill others because they killed.

At the offices of the Prison Department, impressive with ceiling-high filing cases containing the records and descriptions of thousands of convicts, there were friendly enough greetings until the name "Davis" was mentioned. Then significant glances were followed by silence when the question was asked as to where Davis could be found.

"While it is not a department rule, it has been a tradition here for years never to divulge the home of Davis to any one," replied a man who has been with the department nearly a score of years.

"Did Davis make that request?" he was asked.

"I am not sure," he replied, "but, anyway, it has been carried out. I don't believe even his neighbors know he is the man who manipulates the state's electric chair. He naturally would not want them to know. Men are very reluctant to do that work, and should Davis die or give it up it will be hard for the state to find a successor."

Another official said he did not believe Davis was the man's right name, and that it may go down in history as the common name for him and all state executioners who come after him, just as "Jack Ketch" was given to generations of England's hangmen.

"Would it be possible to get a picture of Davis?" the official was asked.

"I don't believe a picture of him was ever published," he replied. "There have been drawings made of him, but none has been authentic. He said recently he had never had his photograph taken since he became electrocutioner—to keep his identity as unfamiliar as possible lest some crank attempt to wreak vengeance for some relative or friend on him."

When John B. Riley, State Superintendent of Prisons, was asked about Davis, he said:

"I know very little about him—in fact, I never saw him. I think he lives somewhere around Elmira. The negotiations with him are carried on entirely through the prison wardens."

### WHAT MEN SAY OF THIS UNKNOWN PERSONAGE.

A clerk who has been with the department many years said the executioner came to the offices very seldom, the last time being about a year ago.

"He always seemed to have a peculiar smile on his face," he said. "He is a man of about sixty years of age, five feet seven inches tall, slender and somewhat spry in his actions, and he has sharp features and a dark complexion."

To those who have met Davis and talked with him, there was something uncanny about him, for his grewsome profession seemed to have become a part of his personality. A former warden of Sing Sing once said:

"I could hardly bear to eat with him when he used to come to the prison for executions. Sometimes at meals he would talk about his work—how hard one man had taken his death, how easily another had succumbed to the shock. It made me so sick sometimes I had to leave the table."

An official connected with the Albany County Sheriff's office, and who had attended several electrocutions at Dannemora, told how he had found Davis an unusually taciturn man until one day they were returning together from the prison on the train after an execution.

"As the train rushed along," he said, "Davis sat for a long time wrapped in deep meditation. The most noticeable thing about him was a sort of fixed smile, due to his protruding teeth. Suddenly he became reminiscent and began to talk of his life work. He seemed to feel sincerely that his work is one of humanity. With his quiet, gentlemanly demeanor one would never pick him out for the man devoid of all human sympathy that one would expect a public executioner to be. He proved to be a most interesting conversationalist when he got started.

"'I feel that in putting men to death in the electric chair,' he said, 'a humane act is being performed. They have got to die, and somebody must pull the switch that turns on the electric current. The courts that sentenced them sealed their doom, not I. And the electric chair is certainly an improvement over the crude, bungling method of hanging. Some men who have witnessed electrocutions have found things about them that were unsightly.

"'Persons put to death in the electric chair die painlessly and instantly. Death is accomplished in not more than one-sixteenth of a second. Countless minute hemorrhages take place in the brain and the lungs instantly collapse.'

### HE NEVER READS ABOUT MURDER TRIALS.

"Davis went on to say that he made it a practice never to know anything about the cases of the men he puts to death. 'In order not to have feelings one way or another about their cases,' he said, 'I never read about murder trials. I want to know nothing about the accused or their crimes. I have found it is much harder to put to death a highly educated man than an ignorant foreigner. The latter has worked up to a state of religious resignation by the prison chaplains, a state of mind that is more difficult to bring about in a man of education.'

Although the officials in the prison department were close-mouthed in regard to Davis, they were more talkative concerning the electric chair itself. The chair, with its method of strapping the victim in, was originally designed by Dr. Fell, of Buffalo, while the electrodes, which perfect the contact with the condemned man's leg and head, were invented by Davis, who is an expert electrician. He also devised the switch by which the current is controlled.

The first electrocution, that of Kemmler in 1890, was carried out only after a fight had been made in the courts to prevent it on the ground that electrocution was a cruel and unusual punishment and, therefore, contrary to the Constitution. Since then the state has purchased Davis's invention and has entered into a contract with him to conduct all electrocutions for a fee of $250.

### THE STIR CREATED BY FIRST ELECTROCUTION.

That first electrocution aroused interest all over the world. No one was allowed to witness it except prison officials, but, to describe the surrounding scenes in the words of one of the oldest prison department employes, newspapermen were there in legion, occupying every point of vantage, from the tops of telegraph poles to the doorsteps of the prison.

Of the 183 persons who have died under Davis's hand, 109 were killed at Sing Sing, 48 at Auburn and 26 at Clinton. One of the few times both on April 13 that four men were electrocuted at one time was July 7, 1891, that case each of the four men had committed a separate murder. They were James J. Slocum, H. A. Smith, a Japanese named Schihiokjugio and a negro known as Joseph.

The early executions were not always successful from the viewpoint of humanity, it being necessary to subject some of the victims to several heavy and nerve racking currents before the doctors declared them dead. But prison officials say that Davis always looked on with a cynical smile when the doctors say a man is not dead after the first shock. They say he always knows that death is inevitable within one sixteenth of a second from the first application of the current; but to make the physicians he always turns on a second application, even a third, as in the case of "Lefty" Louie, the last of the four gunmen to die April 13.

They say, too, that he takes a great deal of satisfaction in the fact that the person he has put to death has never been found afterward to be innocent. His task is sometimes made lighter, he considers, by the confessions that have often come from condemned men during the last minutes.

Before the first human being was officially killed with electricity numerous experiments were conducted on animals. It was found that 600 volts would kill a 1,200-pound bull instantly, while the anomalous fact was established that it takes from 1,800 to 2,200 volts to bring death to a human being with the same painless dispatch, since the wiry persons requiring more than the ones. The shock releases 7 to 10 horse power of energy in their bodies. Davis's experienced eye has learned to judge of the necessary amount as the victims are strapped into the chair.

There are now in the death house at Sing Sing twelve murderers awaiting electrocution and four at Auburn, one of the latter being a woman. If none of them are saved by appeal, and capital punishment is not abolished before their time comes, Davis will earn $3,000 more snuffing out their lives.

THE STATE ELECTRICIAN.

# TO MRS. HAVELOCK ELLIS HOME IS NOT A CAGE

THE English woman who visits these United States of ours today, whether she is well known or not, is quite certain to be asked one particular question almost before the custom house officer gets a chance to put his.

"Are you a suffragist?" is that first demand. The second, particularly if the newcomer has any fame as a lecturer, is:

"Are you going to talk about it here?"

There is newly arrived upon our shores a bright-faced, alert, enthusiastic little Englishwoman with short, curly gray hair, rosy cheeks and the sort of dark blue eyes that always see one's inner thoughts rather than one's clothes—that is Mrs. Havelock Ellis, novelist, playwright and philosopher.

"I feel as though I had come to a beautiful cradle," she announced after the seance with the customs people, who proved to be not nearly such ogres as they are pictured. She was comfortably settled in the Stuyvesant Park apartment, where she is to be a guest while in New York.

"I'm certain that I shall love America," Mrs. Ellis continued, "for all the Americans I have met have been such delightful people, and those on the steamer were so kind to me. Do you know," she confided, "I felt all the way across like a child going to a Christmas tree!

### A STATESMAN FROM PENNSYLVANIA—WHO IS HE?

"One of your nice American men, a statesman from Pennsylvania—I'm not quite sure what his title was—asked me one afternoon if I had one of my lecture frocks in my cabin with me. I told him that I had, whereupon he requested me to put it on that night and come down to dinner at 7:30 o'clock. It was not until that hour that I found that he was giving a dinner party for me, with twenty guests. Such a jolly time that was!

"Yes, indeed, I am a suffragist. I've been one ever since I was eighteen, and now I'm fifty-three," was Mrs. Ellis's prompt answer to regulation question No. 1.

"No, I'm not going to talk about suffrage over here. I shall talk about the larger life which we shall live after women gain possession of their birthright of equal opportunity with men to serve the public good in the same way that man thinks he is serving the commonwealth—by voting for what he considers right as against what he considers wrong."

Mrs. Ellis is not a militant suffragette, however; not a bit of it.

"Militant methods, like all war, belong to the savage, not to the civilized," she asserts. "It is not playing fair to break the laws of a country, or to rob peaceful citizens by destroying their property and then protest at not being allowed to starve to death, or to revolt violently at life being saved by the only means available.

"The vote is imperative, because it is one point in a circle of justice. It is not and can not be the circle itself. It is one of the means whereby woman can at last realize herself as an entity and not an appendage. Woman is awake, and her demands will be met in spite of man and in spite of herself. Man is as absurd a slave to superstition on the woman question as woman is on the man question or the labor question. The labor question and the woman question are twins. The laborer is awake, the woman is awake, and the problems of both are in many ways alike. Freedom must be gained for both, likewise equality of opportunity.

"Some twenty-five years ago Ramsey Macdonald, our labor leader, and I founded a fellowship house for the members of the Fellowship of the New Life, an organization in which one of your Americans, Perceval Chubb, was prominent. We intended to follow Goethe's teaching and live 'the whole, the good and the beautiful.' I was twenty-two then," laughed Mrs. Ellis. "Of course, that sort of thing is all right and quite feasible when one is twenty-two! The result was, however, that we all got married, and found 'the whole, the good and the beautiful' in that way! My book 'Attainment' deals with that experiment.

"Personally, I'm quite well pleased with the outcome. My husband and I have been married for twenty-three years; we are very happy and of the greatest oneness in all essential things. One reason why I feel sure I shall love America is because it is in America, as in Germany, that my husband's work is most understood.

"Do I believe that women should be economically independent? Most assuredly. Throughout my married life I have been economically independent, as I believe it is the only way for women to live the larger life. When we married we vowed a solemn vow that we would not see so much of one another that we would get to the point of saying 'My dear' in a mean, snippy, uncaressing way to each other. We meant to keep the beauty of our love always, to remain sweethearts forever, and so we have lived and labored side by side, each of us with our own separate workshops.

"For twelve years we lived in Cornwall, where I was a practical farmer, and got my copy of the life and ways of Cornish folk first hand. I used that copy in this book," and Mrs. Ellis held up an attractive, green-bound volume, the title of which read "My Cornish Neighbors."

### TWO WEE STONE COTTAGES IN CORNWALL.

"We took two wee stone cottages there, because we could not find one that was big enough for us to be perfectly comfortable in. Mr. Ellis's rooms and the kitchen were in one cottage; my rooms and the dining room were in the other. Some of the good, narrow-minded Cornish folk were sadly shocked, and thought we couldn't love each other any more. 'Her live in one house and him in the next house,' they gossiped, 'and every night the servant maid do lock the door on he and give the key to she!'

"'My plays?'" echoed Mrs. Ellis, who much prefers talking about 'Havelock' and his achievements to discussing her own. "Oh, yes, I have produced several. 'The Subjection of Kezia' ran for six months in the best London theatres; then a stock company played it for a year. 'Kit's Woman' (published in America as 'Steve's Woman') was produced by the Play Actors. Next fall Edith Craig, Ellen Terry's daughter, is to produce my new one-act play, 'The Pixie,' at the Pioneer Players. I have another new play with me, a one-act melodrama, 'The Laughter of the Gods,' which I hope to place here in America.

"I shall have to tell you how I wrote 'The Subjection of Kezia,' for the story is really quite amusing. It is a dramatization from 'My Cornish Neighbors.' I was very ill with bronchitis; in fact, I was supposed to be nearly dying. All of a sudden I felt the inspiration to write that play, so I said to my husband: 'Havelock, prop me up in bed: I'm going to write a play!'

"'Nonsense!' said he, 'you aren't able. Don't be foolish!'

"I insisted, so he propped me up and I wrote that play in two mornings, sent it off to the publisher and it was accepted by return mail. Now, whenever I'm ill, which isn't often, fortunately, I expect to write a play, but, of course, I don't wait for such a time! Yes, I write stories and novels, too, and I've lectured off and on for twenty-eight years.

"I have a new book over here with me that I want to have published in America. No, I think I won't tell the title yet, not until I have arranged for publication."

It is rather too early for the regulation demand for impressions of New York, but Mrs. Ellis assures her callers that she is having a delightful time, enjoying everything and everybody.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, "I just adore animals; so you can imagine my delight at finding a dear little kitten asleep on my bed when I arrived. I have some beautiful cats at Rose Cottage in Cornwall. Look, I've brought their pictures with me. Aren't they dears?

"And I've seen some of those Indians and cowboys of yours, of which I've always heard!" (A dinner party and a trip to the Wild West show were among the first items on the programme.)

The conversation shifts again, this time to eugenics, a subject in which both Mr. and Mrs. Ellis are keenly interested. Mrs. Ellis was one of the speakers at the First International Eugenic Congress held in London.

"Indeed, I do believe that to be splendidly born is quite as important as how to live rationally or to die serenely," she says. "The future salvation of the race depends on the right breeding and the right rearing of children. Happily people are beginning to realize how vastly more important it is to learn the arts of birth, life and death, than to emphasize the accidents of station, wealth and mere intellectual culture. The study of eugenics is a practical aid to the physiological side of good breeding, and so is of the greatest importance in the evolution of human life and progress.

"It is my firm conviction," continued the little Englishwoman, earnestly, "that woman should be by spiritual and physiological laws a constructive agent in the world's work. She is a maternal force, and in the future we must give the maternal force full play, for we are badly in need of a new home and a new state.

"The primitive mother who desired children for her own selfish personal pleasure is rapidly giving way to that mother who will not only devote herself to her own children, but will seek, as far as possible, to cherish every child in the state. Home in the future will be neither a doll's house nor a cage to a woman. It will mean neither the drudgery nor the idleness of the past, nor the unorganized muddle of the present. Woman being maternal has the feeling of home in her very makeup. Surely this is the underlying feeling in her need for the vote, the need to use her maternal powers in the state as well as in the home, to emphasize motherhood in the laws as well as fatherhood.

"But, this point I feel is particularly insistent, woman can never be free, and no vote can make her free, until she is economically independent of man, first as a protest, then as a defence. The true protest of the moment is for every woman to refuse to be dependent on man until she is recognized as an equal citizen with him. The vote can only aid her to enter the vestibule of her real kingdom, and that is one reason it is worth getting."

In her philosophy of happiness, and Mrs. Ellis is a very sane, happy, little woman, she is a bit of a fatalist. That is one of her favorite topics—"The Philosophy of Happiness."

"Happiness, to my mind," concludes Mrs. Ellis, "is a definite art and not an accident, for it is beyond accident, even beyond analysis."

# SEA OF THOUSAND CURRENTS

Continued from first page.

noon this continues. Then for the rest of daylight the town is deader than a village fifteen miles from the railroad with a population of two women who won't speak to one another.

Night brings a reversal of the currents.

A sort of barometer of population current is furnished by the public golf courses in Van Cortlandt and Pelham Bay parks. On a Sunday afternoon in summer it is entirely possible to have a round of golf on one of these courses without much waiting. But let fall appear, with cold water at the beaches, and several hundreds are waiting to "toe up" at midafternoon. The conditions of holiday travel during cold weather have returned.

Another seasonal change is that associated with the days before Christmas. Then the general preparation for the season increases the currents toward the shops. Christmas consultations tend to more north and south travel.

Many of the currents have their own distinctive tempers. Each current has an average feeling. The currents streaming toward work will let a drunken street corner orator severely alone. Work is uppermost in most minds and little street distractions do not matter. The luncheon time currents have more leisure. Relaxation aids digestion, and it is instinctively sought. The orator gets a hearing. He is also certain of attention when the currents reverse themselves and are homeward bound. Any little incident of the streets will be allowed to play its entertaining part in the evenings, too.

The temper, or average feeling, of a baseball current is not unlike that of the streams of workers. With the fans baseball is a serious business. There is comparatively little humor in a crowd on its way to a game; much on the return—if the home team has won.

But the saddest temper and the saddest set of currents in all New York belong to the outcasts, the tramps, "the bums," the park "benchers." While their orbits often seem individual, they have much in common. In summer one end is a park bench; in winter a lodging house—if fortune is kind. The river may be the end of many orbits. From five to a dozen bodies of unknown dead have been taken weekly in summer from a point near the head of Manhattan where the waters of the East and the Harlem rivers join. Boatmen there say that these bodies come from both lower and upper Manhattan. They are caught and washed back and forth at a neutral point between the two rivers. And they equal but a small part of the number never recovered.

This side of the spectacle of the currents of New York makes the philosopher of the streets reflective.

"For there's only two weeks' pay and six weeks' bluffing between many of us and the men in the river," he says.